



PRAVDA?

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On Moving Out of Nicole's New Room

(A Response to "On Moving Into Evan's Old Room")

by the illustrious Evan Danaher

Right... I never got around to actually getting Xander's stuff out. Neither did he. Also, sorry to disappoint, but the googly eyes were also not mine.

And I actually didn't do anything other than sleeping in the bed. Well, I guess there was also some reading. It was softer than the floor. But I was actually pretty good about not coding in bed. That mostly happened at the desk.

Ah... the roof. Without that roof, I wouldn't be the person I am today. The thoughts... the inspiration. I couldn't make that roof any better than it already was. I hope you stare at it as often and as productively as I did. But don't try to fly. It really doesn't work, even for me. Really.

The Barracks

by Benjamin S. Wolf

The klaxon startled me out of my sleep. It had been a long time since the enemy last attacked here, but everyone still recognized the sound.

A dull rumble in the distance was new, though. On the other hand, shouts in the corridor and the sound of people running were not too surprising.

I jumped out of bed, grabbed a helmet, and burst into the hall. Other soldiers, many still in pajamas like I was, were running in one direction. I spotted a friend and joined him in running.

"Kent!" I shouted to be heard over the alarm. "What's going on?"

"We're bein' bombed! The goddamn bastards are bombing us!" he shouted back.

Somewhere behind us, a bomb exploded, closer than the last one.

"Shit!" someone yelled.

We turned a corner in the hall and saw our commanding officer yelling something at the passersby.

I tried to ask him what was going on.

"We're evacuating the building!" He waved us on.

Once we got outside and far enough from the barracks, we turned to watch. A number of wings were in flames, and we could see an occasional blast destroy even more. The remainder of our unit joined us, followed by Sarge.

"So here's the deal, gentlemen, if you haven't found out yet," Sarge began. "There are no bombers, no planes, no rocket launchers. Radar shows nothing." Some of the soldiers looked confused. "What you're seeing," he waved his hand toward the building, "are bombs that have been planted throughout the building."

Kent swore. "Spies!"

Sarge nodded grimly. "It's too coordinated for one. Two, possibly."

"Do we strike back?" someone asked. "How do we rebuild?" said another.

"First, we clean ranks," said the Sarge, pulling his pistol out. "Now, Sader," he said, pointing it at me, "I don't know whether you're a spy or a traitor, but I don't really care." He pulled the trigger.

I awoke sweating in my bunk. After a moment, I calmed myself down. There were no klaxons, no bombs going off, no accusations of espionage.

Not yet, at least. I had done my share, planted my half of the explosives in my half of the building. I had to assume the other spy had done the same. Except that I had received a secret order to place one under his bed. Headquarters was afraid he had been compromised, and so he needed to be taken out so he couldn't talk after the bombs went off later tonight.

They (and I, as well, of course) were confident that I could continue to operate without suspicion. The most important part of espionage is covering your tracks. Perhaps I just did a better job of it. I wondered if I would get a promotion upon mission completion.

Wait.

The most important part of espionage is covering your tracks. What if that's exactly what Headquarters was doing—covering their tracks? Did I need to assume the other spy had done the same?

I swore.

Then my bed exploded.

OUR GIRL IN VIENNA

A Sensational New Science-Adventure, based upon True Events and containing many edifying Insights into the Origins of the Late War.

*Serialized In These Pages by
The Rt. Hon. Alan C. Caum, GMSC, KA, KR, KC, KCF, DS,
III°Pt. OST, &c., &c.*

Part One? A Secret Theft

The morning of April the seventeenth in the year of our Lord 19—dawned crisp and pleasant in Vienna, which was altogether ordinary at that time of year in the climate of that city. Ordinary, too, was the perfunctory attitude with which Vienna's citizens, the subjects of His Majesty the Emperor of the Danube and Archduke of Austria, greeted it. A moment on their doorsteps, or waiting for their trains and carriages, to sniff the breeze—less redolent of coal-smoke than in their fathers' time, with the tang of rock-oil to replace it—and remark absently to their neighbours on the fine coolness of the mist that settled vaguely round them, and then they were off on their million errands in the manufactories and shops and offices of the Imperial and Archducal capital.

Most of Vienna's people, like their fellows in every city of the civilised world, had little time to speculate on the nature of the bustle that surrounded them, to consider the myriad possible stories that might be outlined in the irritated glance of portly retired Colonel von What's-'is-name as he hurried across Mars-Platz, or in the stiff clattering of heels as Frau So-and-so paraded about the Ringstrasse with the air of a woman who has, perhaps, drunk too little wine in her numerous years—to give two examples from the crowds that daily rushed to and fro across the City of Music; still less to think on the possible destinations of the fiacres (a sort of Viennese hackney-cab) and steam-cars that crowded its streets. For all Vienna's reputation as a city of pleasure, art, and romance—which I hasten to add it unquestionably deserves—it was first and foremost the seat of the Hapsburg Emperor, the capital of one of the Great Powers, and in an average day such as this seventeenth of April few in that great ancient riot of a city felt themselves so much at leisure as to ponder the comings and goings of the people and devices in her streets.

At such a place as the Hofburg, of course, these arrivals and departures must necessarily occasion more notice, and there exists a small but vigorous segment of the press devoted to their observation.

Nevertheless, their speculations must remain no more than that, regardless of how many avid readers breathlessly confirm the rumours to their neighbours in the cafés and Biergartens (a sort of large German pub), unless confirmed by the official bulletins which come all too rarely.

On this morning of April seventeenth, at half past eight in the morning, there arrived at the Hofburg a fiacre of no particularly distinctive appearance, which was in itself enough to occasion some comment from the perpetual observers in the Kaiserforum. Fiacres, after all, are today used only by the slightly poor, who cannot afford more modern transportation, and the exorbitantly rich, who in riding in them indicate simultaneously their solidarity (to use, with some aspersion, a distasteful modern term) with the common people and their aristocratic disregard for the only-too-common conveniences of industrial life.

Clearly it was impossible that some commoner should be arriving at the Hofburg; those that did arrived on foot, in a ceremony that to this day is held but once a year, on Maundy Thursday, when some twenty ordinary people of Vienna, chosen by lottery, are presented to His Majesty the Emperor to make, in not more than sixty words, their petitions for aid or clemency, which are as a matter of protocol invariably granted, albeit with some occasional modification here and there to maintain the All-Highest dignity: an observance comparable to the custom of distributing Maundy-money in Her Majesty's realms, though coloured perhaps by a disagreeable tinge of Continental absolutism.

No, this fiacre must be in the service of some important personage of the Danubian Empire: but which of these illustrious men would deign to arrive at the very hub of that Empire in so inglorious a transport? The newspapermen spent much of the morning furrowing their brows over the question, and (the actual conveyance of passengers taking place in an inner court not visible from the square) never attaining any kind of answer, they determined jointly to speculate distantly in their future articles about some new

mistress of the Emperor's second son the Prince Frederick Maximilian.

They were, as they well knew, entirely wrong; the Prince Frederick Maximilian was at that moment being wakened by his valet at a lodge in Hungary, preparatory to the day's hunt, and his mistress of two years, with whom he showed no sign of dissatisfaction, was still asleep in the adjoining room. These trifling details the hard-working men of the Viennese scandal sheets kept to themselves, as not fitting for the consumption of a moral populace.

* * *

The fiacre's occupant was in fact the Right Honourable Joseph von Altofen-Ehrenstein, Minister of Science, who had taken the fiacre simply because one of his coach-horses was down with some equine variation of the common cold, and he was far too thrifty to have bought more than two horses.

Within five minutes of the first furrowing of a reporter's brow in the misty Kaiserforum outside, Herr von Altofen-Ehrenstein was being ushered with a most un-Austrian celerity into the All-Highest presence of His Imperial Majesty Francis the Second, by the Grace of God Emperor of Lavonia, and of Illyria, King of Jerusalem (a rather empty title for which he competed with the King of Spain and the Grand Turk), Grand Prince of Moldavia and Wallachia, Duke of Anhalt, Protector of the Serbs, and a great many other things as well, who (as my readers will well know, having studied the History of the Great Powers in school) was a kindly, grandfatherly old gentleman, the most punctilious and correct in Europe, with his fine Hapsburg nose drooping a bit in age and his luxuriant side-whiskers and receding hair gone to a grey almost white.

Their initial exchange of pleasantries was cut short, as the Emperor (who rose from his iron bedstead habitually at four o'clock in the morning) had already been informed of the urgency of his Minister's visit. His Majesty steeped his hands

gravely before him, resting his elbows on his great oaken desk, and intoned, "What is so urgent, Joseph?"

Taken aback by his Sovereign's unaccustomed brevity, the Minister could but reply in the same fashion: "The plans have been stolen, Your Majesty."

"The plans? For the battleship Durchlaucht?"

"No, indeed, Your Majesty, though that would be a misfortune of similar weight." (Attentive readers may recall that the five Danubian Durchlaucht-class dreadnoughts, though some of the most advanced and fearsome warships of their day, were anticipated in most of their important features by the Indefatigable class of our own Royal Navy.) "No, Your Majesty, I speak of the Luna-Projekt plans." This gave the Emperor, who had already led his people for more than half a century through many wars and upheavals, a moment of pause. That men could visit, and indeed dwell upon, other worlds was an accomplished fact of politics: our own great Empire had at that time maintained colonies upon Mars for more than a generation, and Danubian traders and explorers were spreading across the Martian hinterland in preparation for similar efforts, in competition with the pathfinders of Russia and France. But the Luna-Projekt was the most guarded secret of the Danubian Empire, for its aim was nothing less than the conquest and permanent settlement of our own Moon.

The Moon, being the nearest celestial body to the Earth, was naturally the first goal of mankind's explorers of the heavens; the very oldest of my readers might dimly remember the day our Empire's flag was planted in the crater Clavius upon its surface, although the reminiscence is somewhat spoilt by the near-simultaneous flag-placings of Danubia, France, Russia, China, and the Kingdom of Brandenburg-Prussia, though that unfortunate Kingdom did not long live to glory in its first excursion into the aether, being shortly thereafter dismembered by the Tsar and the Kalmar Powers. But the Moon, being airless,

could not readily sustain human life—how unlike Mars, whose atmosphere, however harsh and unfamiliar, is more than able to support many millions of our colonists! No, the Moon, though easier to reach by far than Mars, Venus, or the other, farther-flung bodies of our solar System, had remained unclaimed and uninhabited, home to only a few optimistic flags and commemorative plaques, for decades—but the Luna-Projekt might change all that, and swiftly bring the Danubian Emperor into an unprecedented state of dominance over the whole surface of the Earth: for what position, what high ground, better dominates the lands and seas of our lovely blue-green world than its own Moon?

"Does this mean the Project cannot go forward?" asked the Emperor.

"No, Majesty. There are copies of the plans in my own office, and at the Experimental Facilities, and the work is proceeding on schedule. But the theft means our advances will no longer be ours alone: another Power may seek to duplicate our successes, and colonise the Moon before us."

The Emperor frowned. "Are there any clues? Any leads?"

Minister von Altofen-Ehrenstein sighed dismally. "No, my Kaiser. But there is only one Power with the resources to not merely duplicate, but anticipate us."

* * *

To what Power does the Minister refer? (As though any of our patriotic readers had not guessed on the instant!) What will become of the Danubian Emperor's most confidential experiments? And who is the plucky and determined agent who wrested these mighty secrets from beneath the nose of our Continental cousins? Who but—OUR GIRL IN VIENNA! Read Part Two of this thrilling and educational tale in the next number of this very publication! God Save The Queen!

Marco's Other Kitchen

by goob

Marco has another kitchen.

This is possibly overstating it. The second kitchen is largely a slab of concrete, covered over with fitted slate tile. There is a well head here, made of old brass. It is pumped by hand, and pours water out onto floor in gasping spurts if there is no bucket there to catch it. The floor is wet. There is only one wall, one low wall of brick and topped with tarred wood. There are holes in the floor, filled with dead leaves. Marco says he has poles and a wine red canopy to give the kitchen shade in summer, but he cannot find them. The plants have grown wild and thick out here, on the other end of the garden. There is little need for poles or canvas.

I am sitting in the reclining chair of slatted wood turned grey by the battery of the seasons. The only other furniture is a table, even greyer than the chair, knocked out of true by time and use. It looks as if it barely be able to support itself. Juliet is thin enough that for her to sit on the table would look only mildly dangerous. Juliet is sitting on the table. She is swinging her feet beneath her in careless, deliberate arcs, and the table creaks and sways with the movement.

Juliet asks me, "do you think Marco built this himself?" Her feet make work of the air beneath her, and she has turned out against the table. I stare at the slate below by feet. I do not know too much about stone or building. I imagine how much work it would be, to mix and haul enough concrete to make the bottom part of this place. I am briefly gripped with the image of the two of us, sitting on a thin square of stone bridging some secret and terrible pit of ragged walls that reaches deep into the earth. It passes.

I imagine bringing up the slates, two at a time and heavy, piling them perhaps there or there before putting them down in mortar. I have a little experience with brick walls: the wall would have been hard work, but simple work. I think one man could be capable of it if the concrete came from a truck. I can certainly imagine Marco out here, younger, hair back under a kerchief, building

because he wanted to.

"Perhaps," I tell her.

Juliet nods at me, oddly in time with her feet. Her skin is darkening, now, even as her hair is turning lighter under the days of unstemmed sun. She does not look at me, but keeps her eyes on the thicket of wilds beside us, on the opposite side of the kitchen from the garden, where things grow dark and strange.

"I've been here longer than you," she says. She is looking at me now. There is little challenge in her voice, and I wonder now how many days she has been staying at the house. "In the winter, I've watched him come out here and bank coals against this wall." There is a spot down the wall that is blackened, and she points to it without her eyes leaving mine. "He roasts things over them." She gestures towards the floor by my feet. "He sits here, out of the wind, under a blanket."

Around us it is hot, and growing hotter. The air is thickening into a summer afternoon. I try to imagine the private comfort of the blanket on the cold wind, pulled together at the chest, but the sun shines on around me and I cannot. The green around us is pure and deep under the tempered blue sky and the light, golden and strong. For the moment, Winter has been made impossible in this place.

Consent of the Governed

by zsparks

Most people in this era believe that a government cannot exist without the consent of the governed. We have signed an implicit social contract with our government that basically says we'll obey the laws of the government in exchange for its protection. This is the way governments have been done since the days of Locke, and it's generally considered a good idea.

But what if we had something different? We're born into the country in which we live for probably the rest of our lives; we have no say in our political allegiance. Life tends to follow this pattern. Why are Pittsburghers such huge Steelers fans? Mostly because they were born here; even if

they were a terrible team, I'm sure they would still have a rabid cult following. You go somewhere based on your job or your birth or any one of a thousand other factors, and you assimilate their customs, pass them down to the next generation and the generation after that.

I propose something different: elective government. I don't mean elected government; I mean government that you choose whether or not to follow. People complain about taxes, so let them choose exactly how much money to pay. Want the fire department to come? Then make sure you pay your fire tax. If you don't, it's not a crime; you just don't get anything beyond your nicest neighbors and a few big buckets after you forget to turn the burners off. The government provides a service; if you want that service, fine, but if you don't, then you just don't get it and keep that part of your money. Keep in mind that this focuses only on services, not on laws; law enforcement always comes down to who has the bigger guns. When in Rome, and all that good stuff.

This makes governments more of a service provider - an insurance company of sorts - than an actual government, however, and this is where we run into the problem that has plagued politics forever. **Who watches the watchmen?** It's Godel's incompleteness theorem for society, and it won't just go away. Obviously, we can't have government regulation; it is outside the scope of the governments I am proposing here. Perhaps a larger body charged with the oversight of these smaller groups would be in order. It would function much like governments do today, but with one major distinction: it would have no direct effect on the people, only on the governments. Its sole purpose would be to prevent unchecked capitalism from coming in and ruining everything.

Sock Guy

pittsburgh craigslist > missed connections (16 March 2009)
<http://pittsburgh.craigslist.org/mis/1077358034.html>

Sock Guy-(CMU)

You: Usually sitting in the second row, on the left-hand side of the lecture hall in Kesden's 213

lecture. Black peacoat, sideburns, black-rimmed glasses, tendency toward stubble.

Me: Unimportant, but giggling.

Every day in lecture I watch you. You seem so comfortable. So comfortable do you seem that you consistently remove your shoes and stretch your legs out over the seatback in front of you. Your socks, mismatched - I look for them every lecture. They're interesting socks, never the plain white gym socks that your fellow CS majors pair with boring white New Balance. "You've got style, kid," I think, as I watch you fondle your ankle. Once there was a hole in your right sock, providing convenient toe access. On occasion, you removed a sock completely. Once you slipped your hand into a sock that had once graced your foot. I watch you play with your toes, touch the guy next to you, put your hand in your mouth. You usually sit next to that guy.

Once I saw you using Facebook IM in class. It disappointed me, but I would never turn you in for violation of the AM Memorial Policy. If you failed 213, I wouldn't get to watch you. Who were you talking to, by the way? Was it really that important? In any case, you seem to have stopped coming to lecture, but my hopes are high that you will return.

I'd say you should talk to me, but that would sort of ruin the experience of watching you idly caress your toes. Frankly, I think it's much more humorous if I remain forever your anonymous admirer.

Thanks for being quirky and brightening my day!

SAVE THE DATE!

Capture the Flag With Stuff!

This Friday, March 20

Rules start at 7:00PM (1900 hours), DH 2315

Let us know by the end of the meeting if you want to judge.

Accurate representations of the game are always encouraged.